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ABSTRACT

An external, formative evaluation of a component of the Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP), formerly Refugee Education and Employment Program) is reported. The component, AALS, is a transitional program linking the adult education program (REEP), Marymount University (Virginia), and a local community-based Hispanic organization. An introductory section summarizes program accomplishments, including extensive outreach efforts, counseling and advising, a curriculum reflecting a continuum of language learning from pre-literacy to the college level, access to technology and alternative learning techniques, transition classes within each organization, and establishment of strong links between providers. The remainder of the report describes and evaluates these aspects of the program: system-wide coordination efforts; promising practices used as part of the program; student response to the program, lessons learned, and recommendations for program improvement. These include streamlining the curriculum and simplifying content, analysis of student responses to the reading component through journals and discussions, formalizing learner assessment, particularly in areas critical to transition, coordinating efforts to develop learner assessment, developing assessment standards for transition, and teaching beginning students. Additional implications for the field in general are outlined. (MSE) (Adjunct ERIC Clearinghouse on Literacy Education)

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MEETING THE CHALLENGES OF TRANSITION

PERSPECTIVES ON THE REEP/AALS TRANSITION PROJECT

by

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INTRODUCTION

The AALS project developed by the Arlington Education and Employment Program is one of three federally funded transition programs funded by the Department of Education as part of the English language literacy grants. Originally designed to fund three year projects, the grants were reduced to two years, when the English literacy grants were zeroed by the administration. The loss of the third year has meant that projects are losing the opportunity to document long range success and provide follow-up on the effectiveness of the programs, structures and coordinations that promote transition. The projects are now at the end of their first year of implementation with a second year to follow.

External Evaluation Efforts

This report constitutes a formative evaluation of the first year effort. It serves as a companion piece to the report submitted by the Arlington Employment and Education Program[1] and is meant to be read in conjunction with the information and data contained in the Year 1 project report. The external evaluation is based on 2 site visits to REEP, as well as another site visit to one of the partners, the Arlington Employment and Training Center. Visits included interviews with staff, teachers, and students as well as interviews with representatives from partner agencies: REEP, the Employment and Training Center, Hogar Hispano, (the local Community-based organization), and Marymount University (the higher education partner). Evaluation efforts also included a

[1]The Year 1 report submitted by REEP represents an internal evaluation that followed a framework developed jointly by the Department of Education, the projects themselves and the outside evaluators. Using this framework, the project report (1) outlines the local context where the transition project takes place, (2) identifies the barriers that ESL students in Arlington are facing in trying to transition, (3) discusses the project design; (4) examines the challenges to implementation that the project has faced and (5) reports on the impacts that the program has had so far, both in terms of facilitating learner progress toward transition goals and in terms of creating a more highly coordinated delivery system. The internal report, available from the Department of Education constitutes a thorough description of program successes and challenges.

review of the transition curriculum developed by REEP and three days of joint meetings among all three transition projects: AALS in Arlington, Virginia, Project MELD, developed by the State Department of Education in Massachusetts and the STEP Project run by the El Paso Community College in El Paso, Texas. These meetings included discussions of the challenges the projects have faced so far, the successes they have achieved in implementing key components of the project and the development of a framework that could be used to assess learner progress and measure program effectiveness. REEP hosted all meetings. This report is designed to comment on both the accomplishments of the project and the challenges that the project is facing from a broader perspective. It also includes recommendations for the second year and a discussion of policy and research implications for transition programs.

SUMMARY OF PROGRAM ACCOMPLISHMENTS

During its first year operation, AALS has met or surpassed all of its objectives. It has established a pattern of coordination among its partners, designed and implemented a transition curriculum, and established special transition classes that link (1) the adult school (REEP), (2) the agency of higher education (Marymount University) and (3) the local community-based organization (Hogar Hispano). 305 slots were provided for students and 155 students were served through the program.

The results of the project in terms of systems changes have been impressive and the following transition components are now in place:

- extensive outreach efforts have been established in the wider Arlington community and hundreds of potential students have been made aware of the educational options that exist in their community;

- a strong counseling and advising component is in place. A one-on-one case management system has been established that helps students articulate their goals, provides a map of the educational options the student might take and

documents learner progress. [2]

- a new curriculum framework has been developed that provides a continuum of academic language and literacy skills from the pre-literacy to the college level; this curriculum spans the services provided by the CBO, the adult school and the participating university;

- the learning center at REEP offers access to technology and provides alternative ways improving skills; at the Employment Training Center students have access to computers as well and working on a basic skills program at ETC is a required part of the curriculum; (for limitations of this approach, see p.

- transition classes have been instituted at Hogar Hispano, REEP, the Employment and Training Center, and at Marymount University each focusing at different aspects of language, literacy, and learning.

- strong links between the providers have been established and structures for coordination and transition have been set up. This has resulted in an increased awareness of the services that other programs provide and a common understanding of the barriers that students face in accessing services.

- joint efforts and increased communication between partners has resulted in a model that has increased both the knowledge base and commitment of each partner. The result has been an information network where transition from provider to provider is seen as a shared responsibility and where transition problems are addressed through a common framework of decision making.

[2] While in some cases progress is defined in terms of movement toward a goal, in others it might mean that a learner now has a clearer sense of what appropriate goals might be. Thus changes or refinement goals counts as progress as well.

SYSTEM WIDE COORDINATION EFFORTS

As is true of other collaborative efforts, REEP has found that implementing successful transition models is a very difficult task that takes time, commitment, energy, and the necessary resources to make a difference. The challenges that the project has faced mirror the difficulties that other programs have experienced in establishing collaborations. The strategies that AALS has developed serve as guidance to communities considering transition projects.

Linking Partners Through an Integrated Delivery System

As is true in other areas of the country, the ESL service delivery system in Arlington has been fragmented, consisting of largely unrelated efforts to provide a variety of different language, literacy and training opportunities for adults who are not yet fully proficient in English. Lack of coordination between those services can be attributed to the fact that service providers receive funds from different sources and are shaped by different policies and guidelines. The transition project, based at the adult school (REEP) has built a network of providers that are linked through a common goal: to provide an integrated system of services that makes it possible for students to advance within programs and transition from one agency to another. Each partner played a role in establishing an educational continuum:

The Arlington Education and Employment Program (REEP) receives some funds from the Department of Health and Human Services (refugee funds), from the Department of Education (as part of the National Workplace Literacy Projects) and from student generated tuition. Unlike other adults schools, REEP does not receive any Adult Basic Education funds. As a result, REEP has not been able to offer free ESL services to students who do not meet the eligibility requirements of categorical programs, such as workplace or refugee. The REEP curriculum is shaped in part by the expectation of these funding sources that learners receive the kind of English they need for economic self-sufficiency and preparation for work and job training. Since none of the funding sources in the past has stressed

preparation for higher education, the REEP curriculum, up to now, has not included the kind of academic/cognitive skills necessary for entry into college or university and for academic success.

What has changed? As part of the AALS project, REEP has revised its entire curriculum, infusing each level with the skills thought to be essential for transition. These include the introduction of academic skills, including prose or "essay" literacy, a focus on learning how to learn (study skills) and a greater emphasis on problem solving and decision making. A special emphasis is place on helping students to set goals and making informed decisions regarding what educational path to take. There is also an increased emphasis on building students academic background knowledge and providing them with up-to-date information on the structures and processes that make up the educational system in Arlington. Strategies on how to access various components of the system are included as well.

Hogar Hispano, the CBO partner, is a Hispanic family center established by the Catholic Diocese of Arlington. Besides ESL and classes in Spanish literacy, the agency offers social, welfare and legal assistance, along with family counseling and referrals. Hogar Hispano is a on-profit voluntary agency that depends on donations and foundation funds (the agency is a United Way member agency). ESL and literacy classes are run by committed volunteers who receive some staff development in ESL but who otherwise have no credentials in adult education or training in teaching English as a Second Language. Since the services are located at sites in the community and since many of the teachers are bilingual, Hogar Hispano constitutes the "program of first entry" for many adults in the community. Like other CBOs, the agency seems particularly effective in providing access to education for immigrants who are unfamiliar with or intimidated by more formal programs and who need and want some basic English skills. Since the CBO receives no federal or state funds, no particular instructional focus is specified.

The agency, which offers classes at several sites, provides classes in general English and no special emphasis is placed in English for work or on developing academic literacy. As is true for CBOs in other areas, in the past, no formal relationship and no coordination existed between the CBO and the adult school (REEP) or the Employment Training Center.

What has changed? The AALS project now links the CBO to their agencies in the community. Students benefit in a number of ways: (1) they gain the information about the different kinds of language and training services available in Arlington, (2) they are provided with opportunities to discuss their career goals and consider the educational options most appropriate for them, and (3) they are part of an overall system that considers their short term language and literacy needs along with their expectations for training and eventual employment. Students at he lowest levels of the educational continuum, who are not ready for training or academic work also benefit: since the CBO has instituted a Spanish language literacy class, they are starting to develop the basic literacy skills they need to function successfully in their communities and take advantage of the educational opportunities that exist for them.

The Arlington Employment Training Center (ETC) receives a variety of funds, including Virginia state funds for training and employment, as well as federal JTPA funds appropriated through the Private Industry Council (PIC). In addition, the Center receives money from the Department of Education for their Bilingual Vocational Training Program (classes are offered in Spanish and in Vietnamese) and from the Department of Health and Human Services for job training for refugees. In the past, training applicants to ETC whose skill levels were considered too low to benefit from training were counseled to take ESL classes in any one of the available ESL programs in the county, Since no formal evaluation efforts existed between ETC and the ESL program, ETC lost its connection to

potential applicants and the students themselves had to fend for themselves in deciding which program might be most appropriate for them.

What has changed? The Employment Training Center now links to REEP in two ways: learners in the adult school are prepared for some of the academic requirements that are part of training and can continue their academic progress at ETC while taking skills training classes as well. Most importantly, perhaps, both teachers and students at the adult school now have a better sense of the eligibility requirements for training and are kept up to date of changes by ETC advisors who visit the adult program. There is a second advantage, students who enter ETC on their own, but are judged to have skill levels too low for training are now referred to an advisor at REEP who places the student into the appropriate ESL class for basic skills upgrading. Once necessary skills have been acquired, the student moves on to training. This cooperation has an important benefit for training: students not ready for training stay within the system, and thus are able to see their training goal within reach, rather then seeing themselves as sidelined to a general ESL class.

Marymount University is a private university funded largely through tuition. Most of the ESL students at Marymount are international students who have come to study in the United States and plan to return to their home countries. Unlike most of the resident students that REEP serves, international students often have strong educational backgrounds that include years of formal study in English, particularly English grammar. Since both their oral communication skills and their writing skills are not on par with those of U.S. born students, they often need additional ESL courses to succeed in their majors. Marymount University offers an intensive ESL program for students who need a great deal of English skills development before being admitted to academic courses as well as ESL courses that students take while being enrolled in a regular academic course.
In the past, several barriers have inhibited movement of students from REEP to

higher education: (1)lack of familiarity with admission requirements and lack of knowledge about student services offered on campus(academic counseling, financial aid) has kept students from taking advantage of the opportunities that a university or college environment offers; (2) students who completed the ESL program at REEP had not yet acquired the cognitive/academic skills necessary to bypass non-credit ESL programs and enter academic work, (3) unfamiliarity with both the content and the format of the English placement test resulted in students being placed in ESL classes based on low scores.

What has changed? The transition classes instituted through AALS are designed to lower these barriers: The transition class offered at Marymount, free to students, builds the academic and cognitive skills in English that colleges and universities have deemed necessary for success. Instruction is provided by faculty who are familiar with the standards and expectations of the academic programs higher education. Students take their courses in an academic environment, and have access to advisors who know the system and can help them make informed decisions.

The partnership between these agencies has resulted in an integrated delivery system, capable of moving students from initial literacy to basic education in ESL to either higher education or training.

Challenges to Successful Implementation

In implementing a transition program that spans the provider system, AALS has experienced obstacles that are similar to those faced by other programs trying to build coordination. The barriers that AALS has faced, along with the ways the project has chose to deal with these barriers provide insights for programs that face similar challenges:

1. **Turf Issues**

Throughout the adult ESL system, coordination and transition are difficult whenever agencies provide services to similar groups of students and roles are not clearly articulated. The AALS' experience provides a case in point. As the project got underway, some of the teachers at Hogar Hispano felt that they were losing students who previously had been served by the CBO to the adult school. Since both REEP and Hogar Hispano are essentially serving the same group of students, teachers were concerned about their classes as transition students either enrolled in REEP instead of the CBO or transferred to REEP instead of continuing their English at the CBO site. (In the past, lack of information about REEP's services and the cost of tuition kept students from enrolling in the adult school.) As a result of this fear of losing students, some teachers were less than enthusiastic about supporting students' movement from the CBO to the adult school even in cases where students would clearly be better served in a more academic environment.

The project tried to address this problem as soon as the issue became apparent by discussing the overall goals of the project and stressing that students need programs that best fit their needs. Attitudes are slowly changing and not all teachers are fully supportive. The CBO coordinator, Sister Mary, summed up the situation as follows: "I wish we could have predicted this problem and brought them (the teachers) in sooner into the decision making process. We are trying to help them see the big picture, but if they don't come around, I'm ready to put my foot down and say: 'This is the way it is going to be'. Given this situation, the challenge for the CBO in year two will be to help teachers see the big picture and help them understand the benefits of transition from the students' perspective[3] .

[3]Competition for students in a problem in other projects as well, especially in areas where student attendance is tied to funds via an ADA (average daily attendance) formula.

3. Cost Barriers

For many immigrant students in Arlington, the cost of English as a Second Language services is a significant barrier to participation. Of the three partners, only the CBO has been able to offer free ESL to students not covered by categorical funds, (such as refugee services, JOBS, JTPA, state funded employment training). Both REEP and the Employment Training Center must charge tuition for education provided to students not eligible for free services.

While Department of Education has provided some relief, making education affordable for language minority adults is an ongoing concern of the project. So far, part of the federal funds are used to off-set student tuition so that eligible students are able to attend classes for free. This allows transition students to attend transition classes at REEP, ETC, and Marymount. While this solution works well for the life of the project, the programs will need to explore alternative sources of funding if access to the transition program is to continue after federal support runs out. While current efforts to have local businesses and members of the wider community donate money for scholarships for particular students, these efforts are not sufficient to keep a transition project in place.

PROMISING PRACTICES

The REEP/AALS project represents a number of promising practices and innovative approaches in helping students move along an educational continuum. Two aspects of REEP/AALS project deserve special consideration: (1) focused efforts to help facilitate access to higher education for language minority students and (2) development of a curriculum that meets the need of disparate groups of learners.

Facilitating Access to Higher Education

For ESL students with non-traditional backgrounds, understanding admission

requirements and dealing with placement procedures represents a daunting task. Transition programs can help students develop strategies for negotiating these gatekeeping points successfully. AALS is designed, in part, to facilitate entry to higher education through various transition components offered both at REEP and at Marymount.[4] These efforts include the following:

(a) Academic counselors at Marymount University provide information for two kinds of transfers: they discuss the prerequisites necessary for particular majors at Marymount as well as the those needed for access to community college. In addition, counselors discuss the issues to keep in mind for students who plan transfer from a community college to a four year institution (Marymount as well as public universities.) Financial aids counselors discuss the availability of Pell Grants for students who meet the income requirements.

(b) REEP is working actively with the community college to discuss admission and testing requirements. This information is made accessible to potential transfer students in ways that are comprehensible to second language learners. In addition, teachers in the program have gained a better understanding of the admission requirements and the knowledge, skills and strategies needed so that students who transfer from REEP can bypass community college ESL and enter academic programs directly. As is true in other areas, helping students to skip non-credit ESL has been difficult, since even students who appear academically

[4]Although the local community college district (NOVA) would have been a natural partner for the transition project established through REEP, the community college had decided to submit a competing proposal to the U.S. Department of Education when funding for transition projects was announced. As a result, Marymount University was chosen as the higher education partner, instead. Marymount's classes are designed to help students develop the knowledge, skills,and strategies needed to enter the community college and succeed in its academic programs. Efforts are under way to link the community college more closely to the project since the large majority of transition students will not be able to afford tuition at the privately owned university.

prepared are often asked to enter ESL classes. Part of the challenge for year 2 of the project will be to examine the placement procedures at the local community colleges to see if placement criteria can be made more explicit. A second challenge might be to implement an assessment system, jointly developed by REEP, Marymount and the community college district that outlines the skills necessary for access to academic programs (see Recommendations)

Designing a Transition Curriculum for Non-traditional Students

AALS has developed a number of structures and strategies that address the language and literacy needs of students. As is true of other adult ESL programs, the immigrant students served through AALS are a highly mixed group ethnically and linguistically. They differ in educational backgrounds and in their familiarity with the customs and norms of U.S. society, which influences their readiness for training and academic work. This heterogeneity makes designing a curriculum a major challenge. As discussions with staff and teachers showed, student participants can be distinguished along two major continua:

(1) a continuum o**f familiarity with U.S. culture gained through experience in negotiating an English speaking environment,** particularly a work environment. In fact, the transition program includes (1) those who have extensive experience with U.S. culture, particularly through working with fellow workers and bosses who speak English and thus have strong coping skills, and (2) those who have not been part of an English speaking environment and have been somewhat isolated linguistically as well as culturally from the mainstream.

(2) a continuum of **academic experience gained through years of formal schooling and acquisition of academic literacy skills.** At one end of the continuum, there are learners with few years of schooling in the home country and very low levels of literacy. At the other end of the academic spectrum we find students who are highly educated in their home countries (a few have college

degrees) and have strong academic skills in their native language (L1). At all levels of the transition curriculum, the two continua intersect, creating a four way matrix.

strong coping skills/ comfortable with English	many years of formal schooling strong academic skill in L1
unfamiliar with U.S. contexts uncomfortable with English	few years of formal schooling little experience with literacy in L1

While REEP/AALS serves students who represent all combinations. the majority of transition students, however, fall into two distinct groups:

(1) Those who have strong academic skills (particularly in writing and grammar) but lack confidence in their ability to express their ideas in English or deal with situations that require face to face or phone interactions. These learners also experience difficulties understanding what others are saying or interpreting phone messages.

(2) Those who are comfortable interacting with English speakers and many have some work experience (mostly in low level jobs in the service industry). Learners who belong into this group know how to negotiate communication problems in English, but lack the solid foundation in basic English necessary for training and for jobs beyond entry level. This lack of academic skills provides a particular barrier for those students whose job require communication skills such as proof reading, composing notes, summaries or memos, or taking lengthy phone messages.

The AALS Project has recognized that meeting the language and literacy needs of both groups requires a curriculum that integrates various dimensions of language and literacy. As a result, the project offers learning opportunities that reflect both

(1) the **socio-cultural dimension of literacy** by providing opportunities for using language in various social contexts and making cross-cultural comparisons. Discussions of how things work in the U.S. and communicative problem solving has long been a part of the REEP curriculum (its original design has been based on a competency-based survival curriculum). With the implementation of the transition curriculum, a focus on social communication is now also a part of the pre-training course offered at the Employment and Training Center.

(2) **cognitive/academic dimension** by encouraging students to deal with extended texts, both in their oral and written form. As a result of the transition project, REEP now has infused all of its levels with a greater emphasis on expressive writing (traditional survival curricula have focused on filling our forms, writing lists and instructions or offering short descriptions of places and things.) The new curriculum now includes a greater emphasis on learning how to learn (meta-cognitive skills) and on the kind of study skills that help adults become independent language learners. At the higher level transition classes, such skills include effective uses of reference materials, test taking and time management skills along with strategies for gaining meaning from print and for expressing ideas in various forms of writing (applications, lecture notes, letters, summaries, academic essays, memos, etc.). Oral forms of expression are also emphasized and include group discussions and oral presentations.

In rethinking and redesigning its curriculum, REEP/AALS is trying to meet the challenge of any transition project: to design an instructional program that (1) takes into account the learning needs of different groups of students and (2) reflects the academic as well as the social/cultural demands of the next step program.

REEP/AALS seeks to do so by offering a model of learner-centered teaching in which learners discuss their needs and goals with a counselor and take an active part in deciding on the topics and issues that are to be discussed in class. REEP/AALS is now in the process of refining a framework that outlines the skills, strategies and content knowledge that are necessary of students are to move through the system. Year two challenges include developing a counseling and assessment system that identifies the relationship between necessary skills and particular learner profiles.

Limitations of the Curriculum

Much of the REEP/AALS curriculum focuses on helping adult learners develop the language and literacy skills necessary for success in various contexts (community, training and employment; academics). Although all AALS partners agree that both accuracy and fluency are needed for successful transition, they take a slightly different path in helping students acquire these skills. Marymount and REEP offer an integrated curriculum that focuses on topics and themes of interest to the student. Grammar skills and the learning of structures and patterns of English are interwoven and are implicit, rather than taught explicitly. Hogar Hispano and the Employment Training Center, on the other hand use a more direct approach to teaching grammar and basic skills. Many of the teachers use textbooks such as Side by Side that provide practice in various grammar forms (the text is built around student dialogues that require the use of certain forms, such a present tense, imperatives, adjectives in the context of conversational English, etc.)

To what extent can these approaches be considered effective? Most language educators are skeptical of approaches that isolate grammar instruction from discussion of ideas. Asking students to talk to each other by practicing certain grammar forms (as is done in Side by Side), tends to give students the idea that conversations in English are highly structured activities that revolve around the use of certain patterns. (e.g., What will you do tomorrow? I will go to the store). Overreliance on this kind of pair practice fails to prepare for the demands of the kind of social communication they find in the

world outside of the classroom where they are expected to focus on message rather than on form, show interest in the speaker's ideas, share information about themselves, and respond to what is being said in appropriate ways). While grammar practice does have its place in an ESL curriculum (and most students are eager to get such practice), opportunities for free discussion and genuine communication must be provided if students are to communicate effectively with teachers and professors, their English speaking peers, and co-workers and supervisors. An ongoing challenge for REEP/AALS will be to extend the repertoire of CBO teachers and help them develop a broader range of learning opportunities for ESL students.

The Limits of Computer-based Instruction

The Employment and Training Center has chosen a computer-based basic skills program (by CCC) as a way to help develop the English skills of its students. The CCC program is attractive to both students and teachers: (1) It provides access to the computer; (2) lessons are clearly structured and pre- and post tests are provided for each unit; (3) a computer print out shows both students and teachers to what degree particular units have been mastered (results are given in percentage points)

Yet, the benefits of computer-based approach to language development are disputed, particularly if used with ESL learners who have not had formal training in grammar and are not yet fully proficient in English. Many of these students are confused or frustrated by the emphasis on terminology and might do much better with an inquiry based program that lets them discover patterns of English in a more intuitive way. Students with stronger backgrounds often enjoy manipulating these programs and appreciate learning grammar terminology and manipulating sentences. These students might be quite happy using the program on their own time.

The CCC program used at ETC clearly has some benefits inasmuch as it makes learners familiar with grammatical terms and provides practice in taking multiple choice tests. However, it is unclear to what extent exposure to the material improves students reading,

writing and oral communication. As the ETC teacher pointed out, having students engage in English practice on the computer does facilitate a shared language in the classroom and helps when grammar mistakes are discussed (For example, when the teacher says: You need an adverb here, at least the student has heard the term before).). To what extent the knowledge gained through CCC results in increases in language and literacy skills as exhibited in a communicative context is not clear and may need to be further investigated. A challenge for year two may be in two types of inquiry: (1) examining who benefits from CCC program and in what way by matching learner backgrounds with success with the program and (2) investigating to what extent progress on CCC has resulted in increased performance in writing.
This can be done by examining to what extent students are able to self-correct the mistakes in grammar they have made and provide satisfactory answers for these changes.

In the future, ETC might consider a more active use of the computer. This might include asking students to compose, revise, and edit the paragraphs that contain their goal statements on the computer (each entry should be saved to make later comparisons possible), peer coaching around structures and forms that are difficult for non-traditional learners, and using the computer to create customized vocabulary lists for each students that are based on key vocabulary needed in training and for work. Most importantly, the center might consider tracking students progress on the CCC program along with their improvement in writing so that the relationship between success in using the program and progress in using English for training can be explored.

LEARNER PERSPECTIVES

AALS serves a wide variety of learners, with backgrounds that are mixed ethnically and linguistically. Students present a mini-United Nations, coming from countries like Afghanistan, Angola, Bolivia, El Salvador, Eretria, Cambodia, Bangladesh, Vietnam, Morocco. Discussion groups with students at the Employment Training Center and at

REEP showed that students are generally enthusiastic about the transition project and eager to move through the system. The ETC students in particular were full of praise for the program. They especially appreciated the access to training and the job search information that the program provided them. All felt that as immigrants, they neither had information on the kinds of jobs that are available outside of the service industry, nor did they have the training required for access to better jobs. In the view of the students, transition program provides both.

Student Views of the ETC

Focus groups with students provided the following information: Several of the students at ETC had worked or were working on the weekends. Their jobs included cashier, counterperson at McDonalds, newspaper delivery, sales clerk, driving a truck to deliver cleaning supplies and other service related jobs. Through training in business skills or printing, they hope to gain access to better jobs. As reported by the students interviewed, their greatest concern at this point is the catch 22 of newly trained workers: It is difficult to get a job without work experience in the field and work experience can only be gained if someone hires you. (ETC provides some unpaid internships that give students at least some experience in a work environment).

The students at ETC also praised the ESL transition class[5], particularly the teacher's efforts to challenge them and push them along. They were enthusiastic about the kind of English they were learning since it was directly related to both their training and the kind of job situation they hoped to encounter in the future. The students reported that they especially appreciated the small class size and the individual attention that they were able to get from the ESL teacher. All felt that the small group instruction used in the

[5]The only criticism expressed by students was related to the computer training class, designed to teach computer applications, such as DOS and Lotus, 1,2,3. Students expressed strong dissatisfaction reporting that not enough time was provided in the training and did not feel prepared to take on spreadsheet programs. (The computer class is not an official part of the transition program)

program allowed them to help each other and thus learn faster than they had in larger classes in the past.

Students were particularly enthusiastic about having been given advice and information on how to continue after REEP and having been helped with the transition process. One student summed up the problem facing students attending general adult ESL classes: "It's the same for us and our friends. When we finish English school, we don't know where to go". The transition project has provided that guidance and shown these students the next step in their academic career.

Although ETC is focused on job placement, all students indicated that they considered their next job as part of a career ladder – most wanted to go on to community college eventually, but needed to support themselves (and in some cases their families) in the meantime. They knew that paying for college tuition and for books on a part time salary in the service industry was not possible. Getting intensive skills training coupled with orientation to the U.S. workplace and English language and literacy training provided them with the kind of "leg up" they need to advance in their careers. Yet higher wages is not the only consideration of these students: they felt that getting a skilled job would provide them both with a greater measure of job security and the respect they feel they deserve. As one student explained: "When the bosses don't pay us, or treat us bad, or fire us from one day to the next, they hurt our feelings. We are not nobodies. In our country, we were something."

Student Views at REEP

The students interviewed at REEP also praised the transition program. Being at a slightly lower level of English proficiency than the ETC group, they were somewhat less articulate in their assessment of the program but seemed satisfied nevertheless. Students reported that they particularly appreciated the opportunity that the transition class provided to express their thoughts, discuss ideas and hear what other students had to say. They were split on the benefits of the computer center, with some students

wanting more access to computers, others feeling lost. One student summarized the concern: "We need a teacher to explain why. The computer cannot answer questions." Students discussed their desire to continue their education: some wanted to go on to college; some wanted skills training at ETC. Both groups wanted additional information about various aspects of transition: they wanted to verify the eligibility criteria for free training and asked questions about the testing requirements at the college.

LESSONS LEARNED

The concerns of REEP students about eligibility requirements and questions about admission and testing reflect the concerns of transition students anywhere. REEP/AALS tries to provide that information in various forms: through one-on-one academic counseling and case management, through group discussions in the classroom, by inviting speakers from the receiving institution to answer questions for students and through reading and reviewing relevant information packages, catalogues, etc. Yet, for some students, who lack background knowledge in how the system functions, the information may seem insufficient and overwhelming at the same time. In the future, the transition project might consider having students play a more active role in finding information about the topics that worry them the most.

Examples

Transition Projects might consider group projects in which learners survey the class to find out the most pressing questions their classmates have and then research the answers using the information sources (advisors, background materials, catalogues) that REEP is making available already. Students collect the information, doublecheck the answers, and then turn the materials into either a Q and A Fact Sheet or a simple brochure written by students for students (a student produced "College Access" video might be another possibility).

Other possibilities include short True/False Quizzes that students take to identify what

they know and don't know (e.g., You must be a highschool graduate to go to a community college in Virginia; Non-citizens are not eligible for financial aid from the U.S. government;. the Employment and Training Center offers a bilingual vocational program in Vietnamese, etc.). Again students can be asked to work in teams researching the correct answer and presenting their findings to the rest of the class. Students can also be asked to generate their own true/false statements and quiz their fellow students. A survey with other learners can be conducted to find out how much their fellow students know about the system and in what areas the greatest misperceptions exist.

Ongoing Challenge: MIS

Setting up an information sharing system has proven to be more complicated than anticipated; as other programs have found, establishing electronic networks, deciding which categories should be included in the data base, providing input mechanisms and sharing information via modem is costly and takes time. REEP will continue to develop the system.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Focusing the Curriculum

Deciding what skills are essential for successful transition and participation in higher education and training has long presented a major challenge for the field of second language education. Implementing a transition class that teaches students the skills they need to be successful in academics and training is difficult since skills requirements are complex. In addition, the acquisition of academic skills takes time and a one or two semester course may not be sufficient for students who don't have strong literacy backgrounds. As the project well knows, success in academics and in training depends on several proficiencies including (1) a knowledge and understanding of how the system works and what counts; (2) competence in reading and writing, (3) competence in oral skills (speaking and understanding), and (4) effective learning strategies. Given this complexity, deciding which aspects of academic English to stress constitutes a major

challenge. REEP has been successful in including all aspects of academic literacy in the transition class (oral presentations, process writing, test taking and other study skills, academic reading), resulting in a curriculum that is rich in skills development and quite ambitious in its scope.

Yet, in order not to overwhelm teachers and students, it might be worthwhile to streamline the curriculum and simplify its content. The project might consider using a content-based approach that focuses on a select number of skills and strategies and presents them within the context of one or two major themes (e.g., Education and Training in the U.S.; Advances in Technology, etc). It may be possible to streamline the curriculum by linking essential skills and strategies in ways that reinforces their use, thus cutting back on the quantity of skills and strategies that students have to deal with (for example, students might be asked to work in pairs to research a topic and then present the information they have collected in various forms (lists; Q and A's, oral presentations; essays; charts). Student selected subtopics could be tied to one of the larger themes and instruction could focus on the strategies that are needed to deal with different ways of **presenting** information, depending on the purpose and the audience. Similarly, students could also **receive** information on a topic in various forms (e.g., through mini-lectures or through readings; by interviewing others or by skimming and scanning catalogues). Focusing the curriculum on essential skills might help to keep teachers from feeling overwhelmed by the many demands of preparing students for transition and might make it easier for students to come away with a sense of competence in dealing with an academic topic.

2. Including a "Reader Response" Component in the Curriculum

Both REEP and the Marymount curriculum emphasize reading skills in their curriculum. The reading component includes practice in a number of key aspects of effective reading, including skimming and scanning; separating main ideas from supporting evidence; and understanding inferences. Understanding and use of these concepts is assessed through answers on tests and through teacher observation. Yet the program

might go one step further. Since much of current reading theory (schema theory) stresses learner response as a way of evaluating what has been understood and how the information is integrated into what the learner already knows, teachers might invite students to comment on what they have read and encourage them to link new information with their own experience or with background knowledge that they have previously acquired. To gain insights into the way learners are understanding, interpreting and using the information they find in written texts, response logs, journals and group discussions can be used.

3. Formalizing Learner Assessment

At present, REEP uses a competency-based approach for assessing progress and achievement. Teachers evaluate whether students have met the competencies outlined in the curriculum and whether students are ready for advancement. Teachers use their own assessment techniques (including classroom testing, performance assessment and observation) to gauge whether students are ready for the next level. Incoming students are placed according to their scores on the oral portion of the BEST test and an in-house assessment developed by REEP. To formalize ongoing assessment, it would be worthwhile to collect samples or descriptions of the assessments that teachers are using right now to see whether individual efforts can be linked to a common assessment framework that outlines **what** is assessed at each level, **why** and **how**. Since REEP presents a curriculum that includes cultural orientation and learning skills, as well as language and literacy development, the challenge will be to identify those skills that are essential for advancement through the levels as well as for transition to training and academics.

As the project has realized, if all stakeholders are to receive the information they need, two types of assessment are necessary: (1) a **rich classroom based assessment** that provides teachers and students with information on learner progress and effective teaching strategies; (2) a **broader outcome-based assessment** that identifies the skills and strategies necessary for transition.

Through its alternative assessment project, REEP is well on the way to documenting the various ways in which learners grow and progress. The challenge for AALS, however, will be to focus in those areas that are particularly critical to transition. As a starting point, the project could focus on two areas: (1) **increases in knowledge** (e.g., understanding and use of information related to transition, including connecting relevant information to goal statements; (2) **increases in academic literacy** and **work related communication** (presenting ideas/thoughts/problems orally as well as in writing; understanding and responding to information presented in various forms; solving problems by interacting in teams).

4. Coordinating Efforts to Develop a Learner Assessment Framework Focused on Transition

Since there is only a limited amount of resources, time and energy that the project can spend on assessment, REEP/AALS might consider developing assessment procedures that link REEP, ETC, and the Community College. The partners could work together to develop a common assessment scheme that outlines critical academic/training skills and established benchmark criteria for deciding whether students are ready for various transition points. To keep the project manageable, primary efforts should focus on **one** area, such as academic writing as evidenced in student generated essays and projects. Such a system should take into account various aspects of academic literacy. These may include an assessment of the

(1) **quality of ideas, complexity of thought and organization;**

(2) **clarity of thought, naturalness of language, and fluency in expressing ideas**

(3) **accuracy in language use** (grammar, structure, mechanics).

5. Developing Assessment Standards for Transition

The scoring system should reflect both what REEP teachers in their professional judgement consider standards of good writing, as well as the criteria now used by ETC, Marymount and the Community College to decide whether a student is ready for

academic work or job training. If joint development is not possible, AALS might develop its own scoring system, based on input from all partners.

To help make decisions on the standards for written English that should be set, **benchmark essays** and should be selected. These samples should reflect the kind of work that can be expected from a student who is ready for transition, as well as for those who need some additional writing development or who may need a great deal of additional work in oral communication. It might be worthwhile to set benchmarks for two types of essays: (1) **narratives and personal writings** that reflect self-expression and (2) **content-based, academic essays** that reflect knowledge acquisition, synthesis of ideas, and analysis.

A similar system for **scoring oral presentations** can be developed, as well. Scoring rubrics should include some of the same categories that are used to judge written work, such as fluency or naturalness of expression, comprehensibility (including organization), and complexity of ideas, as well as categories that are particular to oral presentations, such as **making an impression on the audience , eye contact, voice projection, effective use of visuals and appropriate body language.** Project work that culminates in both a written product and an oral presentation lends itself nicely to such an assessment. Oral presentations can be benchmarked, as well, although video taping a series of presentations may be beyond project resources at this point.

There are significant advantages for developing an assessment framework for transition that links the academic and training agencies: (1) Partners develop a shared understanding of the knowledge, skills, and strategies that are necessary for transition to academics or training; (2) Students develop a sense of the standards they may have to meet beyond the ESL classroom and can focus their efforts accordingly; (3) the ESL field will have a starting point for discussing the kinds of skills necessary for success in employment and training and will be provided with examples of context sensitive

measures for assessing readiness to transition.

6. Meeting the Challenge of Teaching Beginning Students

As is true in many ESL programs, serving students at the beginning levels of English proficiency presents a special challenge. This challenge is defined in large part by the task of serving two disparate groups of students: (1) those who catch on quickly to classroom interactions, but lack literacy skills and (2) those who have experience with schooling but have difficulty understanding even simple spoken English or expressing their ideas in English. Students at the lower levels thus must provide opportunities for social interaction and (oral)language development for those students who have some formal education but suffer from "language shock" while introducing reading and writing in English to those who have strong coping skills but lack literacy. To add to the complexity, beginning teachers must also meet the needs of those newcomers who are overwhelmed by all forms of English (spoken and written).

More so than at any other level, the challenge for teachers in lower level classes is to find instructional strategies that develop the literacy skills of those who are comfortable using what little English they know in conversation, while building the oral communication skills of those who are too shy or overwhelmed to speak.

As mentioned previously, REEP/AALS is at the forefront of introducing prose literacy and strategies for learning how to learn into what has essentially been a curriculum that has emphasized survival skills and document literacy. At present, teachers at REEP are actively designing lessons that try to balance the development of rich literacy skills, metacognitive strategies, and acquisition of communication skills. **The project could make a great contribution to the field by collecting instructional modules that illustrate how the knowledge, skills, and strategies relevant to transition can be integrated in lessons designed for beginning students.**

As for **assessment** in the lower levels, teachers might consider developing a framework that focuses on the essential transition skills outlined above: acquisition of knowledge, and understanding and responding to information presented in a variety of forms, spoken and written, and expression of ideas, in spoken English and in writing. Scoring rubrics could be developed that reflect the kind of work students are capable of doing at beginning levels (e.g., they could give short spoken presentations, talking about themselves or their fellow students) Work samples can be collected that reflect the kind of writing improvement that appears in language experience stories, self-descriptions and journal enries. Levels of communicative competence in spoken English can be assessed through observations of student led interviews and group discussions, conferences with students, short personal narratives written by the students (about themselves, their families or their home town), or short oral presentations on similar topics.

IMPLICATIONS FOR THE FIELD

The challenges that REEP/AALS has faced and the successes it has accomplished serve to guide the field in the development and implementation of transition projects. Implications for program development and policy and planning should be considered in three areas: (1) Reducing Barriers Confronting Adult ESL Learners; (2) Strengthening Services; and (3) Improving the Delivery System.

1. **Reducing Barriers Confronting Learners**

The REEP/AALS project has tried to address the external as well as the internal barriers that keep students from advancing along the educational continuum. Unlike some other project which have seen internal barriers or disposition factors, such as low self-esteem or low expectations as the most significant in impeding progress, REEP has identified external barriers as the most critical. The project has found that the cost of education, insufficient preparation in academic skills, and inadequate information about educational options constitute major obstacles to transition.

While REEP/AALS has been able to reduce the financial burden somewhat by offering free transition classes to the target group, this is neither a long term solution or a solution that can be implemented in other areas where tuition is a barrier. The fact remains that low income language minority students often do not have access to the kinds of programs that can help them to transition to higher education or training (where they might be eligible for financial assistance from the federal government).

Policy Implications

Creative strategies must be found to help working adults with limited English skills to gain access to higher education. ABE/ESL funded programs as well as Job Training Programs must help develop transition classes that move learners from survival English skills to attaining the language and literacy skills required in academic programs and in job training institutions. Counselors in academic and training programs need to be more aggressive in investigating the financial aid services (such as Pell Grants) that students might be eligible for and make such information available to students.

All programs, ESL and mainstream, must share the responsibility of making training and higher education accessible to language minority adults who are not yet fluent in English. They can do so by investigating the internal and external barriers that make access and transition difficult and designing projects that teach the kind of language and literacy skills that students need to succeed. While in some cases, special ESL transition classes might be the answer, in others courses that integrate language development and academic or vocational training might be the best option.

Minimally, language minority adults must have access to the kind of academic advising that takes their life circumstances into account and suggests paths for developing the knowledge, skills, and strategies needed to advance beyond ESL.

2. Strengthening Program Services

The agencies that participate in the REEP/AALS project have made significant changes in their curriculum. In revising their instructional efforts, they share a common goal to help move students from pre-literacy to basic ESL and beyond ESL to job training and academic success. At the lower end, the community based organization has introduced a Spanish literacy class to provide access to English for those adults who have few years of schooling. At the higher levels, both the Employment Training Center and Marymount University have developed transition classes geared toward access to and success in their programs. REEP has gone one step farther, by revising its entire curriculum to focus on transition issues throughout. The new curriculum is thus not only designed to promote **access to** English communication skills and literacy but **exit from** ESL to mainstream programs, as well.

Policy Implications

The field needs strong leadership in helping programs focus on transition issues as part of program development and curriculum design. Much of the current design regards participation in an ESL program as an end in itself, rather than as a pathway to higher education, job training, or better employment opportunities. While there is certainly a role for promoting ESL as a means of personal and intellectual development, the ESL fields needs a better sense of how to prepare students for the language and literacy demands of mainstream programs.

ESL programs need to be encouraged to look beyond ESL and prepare students for the demands of non-ESL programs. To that end, ESL programs will have to create classes that are informed, at least in part, by the requirements of the next step program so that transition is facilitated. To be successful in such an effort, coordination and communication with other service providers is an absolute necessity.

ESL programs must acknowledge the fact that adult students are likely to withdraw and reenter programs as they move through various ESL programs. Programs should

provide three kinds of services to these students: (1) provide information and counseling about training and other educational options in the community so students can choose programs that best fit their needs at any given point, (2) set intermediary benchmarks that allow stop-out students to see what they have learned and what they still need to learn in relationship to the requirements of other programs, (3) offer opportunities to acquire strong communication skills, as well as academic literacy at all levels of the curriculum, so that students are prepared for more than just "survival English".

3. Improving the Delivery System

The partnership model that REEP/AALS has developed in Arlington serves as a model for other communities. The obstacles that the partnership has faced in forging a common agenda are similar to those confronting other programs where competition for students threatens to overshadow what should be common goal of helping all students succeed. REEP/AALS is to be commended for realizing that teachers don't necessarily support student transition and for developing strategies for encouraging teachers to see the bigger picture and helping learners to move beyond ESL.

REEP/AALS has also had to deal with the challenge of trying to transition students from adult ESL to academic courses at the community college, avoiding additional placement in non-credit ESL courses. For students whose skills are not strong enough to succeed in academic classes, the goal has been placement in higher level (for credit) ESL along with participation in selected academic courses that do not require a great deal of essay writing. In trying to move students beyond ESL at the community college, the project has faced a significant barrier. While the project has been successful in increasing both the academic literacy and the test taking skills of its college bound participants, students who take the college placement test still get frequently placed into non-credit ESL, a transfer that, in essence, constitutes a move backward in their academic career (In the judgement of the REEP teachers, students are prepared to undertake academic work).

This lack of agreement of when a student can be considered prepared to take on (even limited) academic work continues to plague the field and has even resulted in charges that college level ESL constitutes a "black hole" that draws students away from academic opportunities instead of providing greater access.

Policy Implications

During the past few years a number of transition project have been funded by the federal government and by the states. It is now time to study these efforts to see what lessons can be learned from the challenges they have faced and the successes they have achieved. The Department of Education (OERI) can play a leadership role by funding a study that examines the effectiveness of various transition models designed for underprepared adult students, outlining innovative approaches for moving students through basic skills and ESL toward mainstream training and academic education.

States who have significant numbers of language minority adults should fund community wide efforts geared toward an examination of the knowledge, skills, and strategies that are required by the next step programs and making this information available to adult schools. This information can then be used to develop curriculum frameworks that outline the processes, structures and practices that need to be implemented in any given community to facilitate transition. Programs and community advocates concerned about transition should lobby their states to help make the development of transition programs a priority for funding.

The National Institute for Literacy can provide leadership across agencies and undertake an examination of the transition efforts that the Departments of Labor, Education and Health and Human Services have undertaken. Such a project could identify promising practices in school to work transition (Labor and Education); transition from ESL to job training and employment (DOL/JTPA and HHS funded refugee programs, JOBS efforts), and transition from community college basic skills to academic or vocational programs (Education). Such a study could result in an outline of a common framework for

evaluating transition programs and for assessing learner progress toward transition goals While transition concerns go beyond language and literacy issues, focusing a study on promising ways to transition language minority adults to mainstream programs can fill a large gap in the knowledge base of all the Departments that NIFL hopes to serve.

Finally, the field should consider the development of standards that can help programs decide what processes and structures are necessary to facilitate transition and what evaluation criteria are appropriate for evaluating the success of such programs.